

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 26 May 2021
7.30pm via zoom

Attendance: 33

Guest: Matt Scott, director of Thames Ward Community Project (TWCP)

Meeting started: 7.30pm

The agenda: was agreed.

AGENDA

1. Fire safety protests
2. Access to doctors' surgery
3. Parking
4. Recognition
5. AOB

Minutes and matters arising

It was suggested that the following items are added to AOB: discussion around meetings for phase 2, feedback on Learning Forum's 'BRL Community Conversation Time' and road safety. Minutes from last meeting were agreed.

1. Fire safety protests

Joanna, a committee member for the residents association (RA) and resident of Caspian Quarter (CQ), talked about the planned fire safety remediation protests. Two have been held so far so the next one should be moved to Beckton because the new Bellway site is off the A13 so there is more visibility for potential Bellway customers and other people. It coincides with other national protests on 5 June at 12pm, which are also taking place in Manchester and Greenwich and about 15 other places in total.

These are being organised by our committee members with the help of End our Cladding Scandal and the UK Cladding Action Group. Protests against other developers across the country also include Ipswich, Cardiff, Birmingham, 5 or 6 in London. Residents will be carpooling to the Beckton site on the day of the protest.

Pete Mason, chair of the RA, said that at the latest meeting with Margaret Hodge MP, which took place the day before the first protest started, Bellway said they would have a board meeting to discuss CQ issues at the end of this week. He highlighted the fact that Bellway had already missed a deadline to respond to Encore's queries about the remedial works.

Zara, a committee member for the RA and resident of CQ, said residents were concerned about how payment for the works would be done as Encore's invoicing period is coming up soon (30 June). Pete also said the help to buy scheme repayment date is coming up as well, which means that a lot of people can't re-mortgage or sell. Many do not have an extra £2,600 to pay for the remediation works.

Yasmin, a committee member for the RA and resident of CQ, agreed with Zara's point as many residents don't want to pay for remedial works as they don't have that money available. She also said it's unfair for her to pay for remedial works since she's on the ground floor and has no wooden decking on her patio. Venilia, the RA's treasurer, said Encore's service charges would apply to all residents/leaseholders equally. Maybe there is an individual case against Encore to claim money back. In terms of payments for remedial works, Encore wants full 100% funding available to start the works, but if residents are refusing to pay, or are unable to, Encore maintain that the works would not go ahead.

Joanna said that things are progressing relatively quickly according to Encore, simply because residents are very active on this issue.

Chloe, a committee member for the RA and resident of CQ, said that it would be impossible to collect 100% of funds – the funding will have to come from Bellway or Adriatic. The balconies are a safety issue, there is a risk to life, but there is a financial impact if there is a delay for those on a help to buy scheme or for those residents wishing to remortgage.

Pete put to the meeting that the next protest is held in Beckton on 5 June at 12pm – residents agreed. Joanna said she already gave a press interview this week about the protest, adding that there may be some coverage on the BBC on the day. A press release will be out soon as well and there has been interest from other journalists.

Pete introduced Matt Scott to talk about the two fire inquiries that have taken place, one by the RA and one by the council. Matt said he's working with the British Red Cross, University College London (UCL) and residents along with the RA. The plan is to have an online meeting on Monday 7 June at 7pm to 8.30pm to review the inquiry reports and come up with some practical recommendations, proposals and actions on how to address fire safety around the estate. Matt is also looking to get the London Fire Brigade on board.

Pete said that out of the various protests held so far that a conference has also been proposed where various residents associations and cladding groups come together to share their ideas and solutions to end the cladding scandal.

Venilia welcomed Councillor Fatuma to the meeting and mentioned that even though Councillor Cameron Geddes is the one on the council's planning committee, Fatuma should relay the message that one of the RA's recommendations should be that the council should stop working or approving projects being built by Bellway or other companies that do not fully comply with fire safety regulations.

Fatuma said that she has a meeting booked with Cameron Geddes and Margaret Hodge in the coming weeks to come up with a solution to address the flammable cladding issues around the borough. A potential meeting with Bellway is also in the works. She added that the council does support the End our Cladding Scandal campaign. She said she will give the RA feedback on these meetings once they happen.

Joanna mentioned that Newham council has formed a scrutiny committee so maybe this is something that Barking and Dagenham could mirror.

2. Access to doctors' surgery

Pete said he wrote an email (see Addendum) to Dr John, BRL, councillors and Health Watch raising all the issues that many residents have faced, especially the difficulty in booking an appointment. A response from Cameron Geddes was received. A meeting is being proposed with the doctors, Aurora Medcare, Health Watch, councillors and the RA.

A resident said that BHR (Barking, Havering and Redbridge) hospitals are one of the worse performing in London and this should be raised in the next meeting.

3. Parking

Pete said the committee met last week and three temporary proposals were drawn up for visitor parking on phase 2.

The first one addresses the L&Q sales office car park (evening and weekends), the second is the Riverside School staff car park (also evenings and weekends), the third one is under the railway bridge arches once completed.

Pete also proposed forming a parking subcommittee to push for these proposals. He noted that L&Q, BRL, the school and TFL should be contacted with these proposals.

Venilia said that for this particular subject of visitor parking on phase 2, these proposals need to be clear that if visitor spaces are available, they should not be clogged up by residents' second cars, which seems to be the case most often in the current limited eight visitor spaces on phase 2. Maybe a timed system should also be proposed with visitor permits (maybe 2/3/4 hours at a time).

Venilia reiterated that these proposals are temporary since the L&Q office will be on site temporarily, and the school car park was lent to the school by BRL until the rail station is completed. The temporary proposals are to provide visitor parking while there is not yet a robust public transport system on the estate.

A phase 2 resident who had previously inquired about the car club said she spoke to Pam Ross of BRL about Enterprise and has proposed to bring one of the car club cars from phase 1 to phase 2.

4. Recognition

Pete mentioned that the RA's recognition process started with CQ residents because of the pressing issues with fire safety and it has had at least 50% of residents sign up.

There are some minor constitution changes so that it is in accordance with the law, which is necessary for the RA to be legally recognised by the landlords. At last week's committee meeting, the RA discussed three or four small changes to the constitution – this was announced and minuted at the last residents meeting. Pete will now circulate to residents in the next few days to be discussed and approved at the next residents' meeting.

Pete said the main change was that only one vote per leasehold is accounted for instead of one per resident.

5. AOB

Venilia mentioned that phase 2 meetings should take place to discuss certain issues relevant to residents on phase 2 – it makes sense as the estate grows for the RA to accommodate such growth.

Chloe mentioned that there will be other issues that affect all residents like the doctors' surgery so a solution needs to be thought about on what format to use to address that. Break out groups within a main meeting were mentioned.

Pete gave an update on the CIC Learning Forum – there should be a majority of residents on the board of the CIC, there are already 2 representing residents as observers.

Rebecca, a resident of phase 2 and a member of the Learning Forum, mentioned that BRL organised a 'community conversation time' session with the Learning Forum explaining what the CIC is and what the Learning Forum has been doing for the past year. She asked for feedback from those that attended.

On road safety, a resident suggested that this be a point of discussion on the agenda at the next residents meeting. The residents mentioned that there has been an increase in speeding cars, cars parked on pavements, and just overall dangerous driving.

Zara also proposed another CQ dedicated meeting for residents to discuss the remedial works for balconies and payment, after the protest.

Meeting ended 9.03pm

Addendum

To: Dr John chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group
Cc healthwatch.
Cc Dr Kalkat

Dear Dr John,

I am writing on behalf of residents of the Riverside Estate, although this matter concerns all residents in the Thames ward that attend the Thames View Health Centre.

I am writing to say that urgent action must be taken to increase provision of medical services from the Thames View Health Centre, in advance of the health hub planned for the Barking Riverside estate in around four or five years.

I feel you are likely very well aware of the situation and am requesting your feedback, but on behalf of residents I must set out the situation clearly.

Despite the heroic efforts of the staff, it now appears nigh impossible, both to residents and to me personally, to get a doctor's telephone consultation appointment. Below I will give a personal experience.

Are you able to record how many people ring the phone line at 8am and can you reveal the numbers?

Recently many residents expressed frustration at their inability to get appointments on our Barking Riverside Facebook group, and we resolved to write to you.

My recent experience is as follows:

At 8am precisely I rang the surgery, having failed to get through on previous days.

After listening to two messages lasting 1 minute 50 seconds, a voice told me it was not possible to connect me and the line was dropped.

I redialled instantly and I got the same message.

This happened six more times.

At 8:14, the seventh time of trying, instead of being disconnected, I was told I was 13th in the queue.

Of course, all the appointments were gone. I was given an appointment with a physio for a medical issue of which he had no knowledge, but himself consulted a doctor, rang me back, and progressed the issue.

How could I consider it possible to get an appointment given this scenario?

The electorate in Thames ward has increased from 6,000 in 2010 to 10,075 today, suggesting that the total population, including children, has almost doubled in ten years. The services have been expanded but incrementally, and by comparison, by a very small amount.

I have lived in Barking Reach for 17 years, and it has never been easy to get appointments, but over the last few years, like many residents, I've come to the conclusion it is nigh impossible, as indicated.

I realise there have been improvements over these years, an expansion of hours etc. and that you and our health workers are heroically coping with a deadly epidemic while being underfunded and offered a deeply offensive pay deal by the government, which shocked the whole nation. I am on first name terms with the reception staff who are wonderful.

But I am writing to say that urgent action must be taken to increase provision of medical services.

Here are a few comments from the recent thread on our Facebook page:-

“Something has to be done about it. I feel like my family is left without medical support.”

“I have tried continuously for an appt over 3 weeks calling every day at 8 but could not get one ultimately had to go through NHS 111.”

“Have not been able to see a Dr over there since the pandemic. Its a decrease.”

“Since it has been taken over by Aurora Medical their SLA has dropped dramatically. It almost feel like they aren’t operational anymore.”

“I’ve been trying for over a month to speak to a doctor for my test results as the reception tells me they can’t let me know about my results as only the doctor can tell me.”

“Honestly worse place to try to book appointment ever!!!! They even try to say call at 8:00am, doing that too doesn’t guarantee an appointment!!!!”

“I was second in a line. They told me there is no more appointments.”

“appointments in the morning just a mess, call just doesn’t got thru, and eventually after 30 Min trying to call them, they telling all appointments gone... very disappointed, I have 3 little kids...”

“I have the same experiences, appointments never available. Each time I went there I had the same answer. What’s the point to have an GP?”

I think the above give some sense of the frustration of residents, particularly parents of small children, that led to this email.

I hope you can provide some assurance of urgently needed improvements to the services, not in future but in the coming months.

We know that a health hub is planned for 2024-25, and that delays to this timetable are possible. I am not expecting the reopening of the Thames View Health Centre surgery to face to face appointments when permitted, will itself improve the situation at all. I am looking at a further and considerable expansion of services.

Yours,
Pete Mason
Chair
Barking Reach Residents Association

Response from Councillor Cameron Geddes:

Dear Pete,

Good to meet up recently and thanks as ever for copying us in on this. Can we arrange a ‘Teams’ meeting for all involved, plus the people I’ve added? Josie and I met with Dr. John and he was enthusiastic to improve provision, but we need to persuade the folk that hold the purse-strings of the need. Thames View Muslim Association has also raised this issue repeatedly over the last year or two.

The need for improved primary care has increased due to the lockdowns and pandemic, making this issue even more important.

Matthew and Ashley, who is best to arrange such a meeting if people are agreeable?

We need to provide the Riverside hub sooner than five years!

Best wishes,
Cameron